AP Language & Composition Rhetorical Devices

Directions: Each time you find a word that is not on this list and you do not know it—add it to this list.

**Absolute**—a term applied to anything totally independent of influences, limitations, controls, or modifiers. In grammar, it refers to a word, such as *all, always, never,* and *no one* that allow no exceptions. Rarely can evidence support such terms. In grammar: words that cannot be compared or qualified, or to a phrase that is free of the customary syntactical relationships to other parts of the sentence.

**Allegory**—a story in which the people, places, and things represent general concepts or moral qualities.

**Alliteration**—the repetition of initial identical consonant sounds or any vowel sounds in successive or closely associated syllables, especially stressed syllables.

- **Consonantal alliteration** Coleridge’s lines:
  The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew, / The furrow followed free.
- **Vowel alliteration** is shown in the sentence:
  “Apt *alliteration’s artful aid* is often an occasional ornament in prose.”

**Allusion**—a figure of speech that makes brief reference to a historical or literary figure, event, or object. Biblical allusions are frequent in English literature. The allusion seeks, by tapping the knowledge and memory of the reader, to secure a reverberant emotional effect from the associations already existing in the reader’s mind. E.g., “I am Lazarus, come from the dead.” T. S. Eliot

**Ambiguity**—a situation expressed in such a way as to admit more than one possible interpretation.

**Analogy**—a comparison between two things in which the more complex is explained in terms of the more simple: e.g., comparing a year-long profile of the stock index to a roller-coaster ride.

**Anaphora**—[a-naf-o-ra] rhetorical figure of repetition in which the same word or phrase is repeated (usually at the beginning of) successive line, clauses, or sentences. Found very often in verse and prose. Abraham Lincoln’s “The Gettysburg Address”: we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground.

**Anecdote**—a short entertaining account of some happening, frequently personal or biographical.

**Anticlimax**—a sudden drop from the dignified or important in thought or expression to the commonplace or trivial, often for humorous effect.

**Antithesis**—the opposite Ex: “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.”

**Aphorism**—A terse (abrupt, short) statement of known authorship, which expresses a general truth or a moral principle. An aphorism can be a memorable summation of the author’s point. An aphorism is a general truth or observation about life, usually stated concisely and pointedly.

**Argumentation**—exploration of a problem by investigating all sides of it; persuasion through reason.

**Attitude**—similar to tone, the writer expresses his personal feelings toward the subject, characters, or audience. Attitude is revealing often though narration. **AP Exam:** Expect to be asked what the writer’s attitude is and how his language conveys that attitude.
**Balanced Sentences**—is balanced when its clauses are parallel—that is, matches in grammatical structure—as words, phrases, clauses in a sentence. Used carefully, they can be especially effective to alert readers to a strong contrast between two ideas.

George Orwell: “If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.” (Hear the rhythm?)

**Pure balance**—two main clauses are exactly parallel—matches item for item.

**Cause and effect**—examination of the causes and/or effects of a situation or phenomenon.

**Chiasmus**—[ky-az-nys] (plural form) figure of speech—a pattern in which the second part is balanced against the first but with the parts reversed. This may involve a repetition of the same words

Byron: “Pleasure’s a sin, and sometimes sin’s a pleasure”

**Chronological ordering**—arrangement in the order in which things occur; may move from past to present or in reverse chronological order, from present to past.

**Classification as a means of ordering**—arrangement of objects according to class. E. g., media classified as print, television, and radio.

**Colloquial expression**—words and phrases used in everyday speech but avoided in formal writing.

**AP Exam:** the use of slang or informalities in speech or writing. Not generally acceptable for formal writing, colloquialisms give a word a conversational, familiar tone. Colloquial expressions in writing include local or regional dialect.

**Cumulative Sentence**—(also called Loose)—sentences begin with the subject and predicate plus their modifiers and then add more modifiers. Such sentences are called cumulative (because they accumulate information as they proceed) or loose (because they are not tightly structured). E.g., Education has no equal in opening minds, instilling values, and creating opportunities. **Note:** Periodic is opposite. It saves the main clause until just before the end of the sentence. Everything before the main clause points toward it. E.g., In opening minds, instilling values, and creating opportunities, education has no equal.

**Damning with faint praise**—intentional use of a positive statement that has a negative implication. E.g., “Your new hairdo is so…interesting.”

**Deduction**—(deductive reasoning)—a form of reasoning that begins with a generalization, then applies the generalization to a specific case or cases; opposite to induction.

**Denouement**—[day-noo-mah] the clearing up or “untying” of the complications of the plot in a play or story; usually a final scene or chapter in which mysteries, confusions, and doubtful destinies are clarified.

**Detail**—the use of detail includes describing or relating an object or scene with complete particulars. Through details very specific information clarifies and makes a more complete picture in the novel. Most details tell who, what, when, where.

**Devices**—the figures of speech, syntax, diction, and other stylistic elements that collectively produce a particular artistic effect.

**Dialect**—a dialect is the form of a language spoken by people in a particular region or group.

**Diction**—writer’s or speaker’s particular word choice used to make a point in the story. Diction deals with both denotation and connotation.

**AP Exam**—related to style, diction refers to the writer’s word choices, especially with regard to their correctness, clearness, or effectiveness. For the AP exam, one should be able to describe an author’s diction (for example, formal or informal, ornate, rambling, plain, etc.) and understand the ways in which diction can complement the author’s purpose. Diction, combined with syntax, figurative language, literary devices, etc., creates an author’s style.
Digression—a temporary departure from the main subject in speaking or writing.

Ellipsis—1. In grammar, the omission of a word or words necessary for complete construction but understood in context. E.g., “if (it is) possible, (you) come early.” 2. The sign (…) that something has been left out of a quotation. E.g., “To be or not …that is the question.” Shakespeare

Epiphany—a sudden revelation or insight of the true nature of a character or situation through a specific event—a word, gesture, or other action—that causes the reader to see the significance of that character or situation in a new light. The term used in Christian theology for a manifestation of God’s presence in the world. It was later taken over by James Joyce to denote secular revelation in the everyday world.

Epistrophe—[I-pis-trofi] a rhetorical figure by which the same word or phrase is repeated at the end of successive clauses, sentences, or lines. Opposite: anaphora

Whitman’s Song of Myself: The moth and the fish-eggs are in their place, The bright suns I see and the dark suns I cannot see are in their place, The palpable is in its place and the impalpable is in its place.

Ethos— an appeal to ethics

Euphemism—[you-few-ism] the use of a word or phrase that is less direct, but that is also less distasteful or less offensive than another. E.g., “he is at rest” is a euphemism for “he is dead.”

Fallacy—Logical fallacy is an error in reasoning. Such errors are common in persuasive or argumentative writing and speech. The following are some of the most common types of logical fallacies:

a. Begging the question—this fallacy occurs when someone assumes the truth of the statement to be proved without providing any supporting evidence. For example: “Robert Frost was the greatest American poet of the twentieth century.” (No evidence is provided to support the claim.)

b. Circular reasoning—this fallacy occurs when evidence given to support a claim is simply a restatement of the claim. E.g., “Robert Frost was the greatest American poetry because his poems were better than anyone else’s” (Second part of the statement simply repeats the assertion made in the first part. No evidence is supplied to support the claim.)

c. Either/or fallacy—This fallacy occurs when someone claims that there are only two alternatives when there are actually more. For example: “Either you love Robert Frost’s poems or you hate them.” (This statement ignores another alternative—that one might not feel strongly about Frost’s poems one way or the other.)

d. False analogy—This fallacy occurs when someone falsely assumes that two subjects are similar in some respect just because they are similar in some other respect. For example: “Whitman’s poems were like leaves of grass: Each was just like the others.” (While there may be similarities between Whitman’s poems and leaves of grass, it certainly isn’t the case that Whitman’s poems are all alike.)

e. Hasty Generalization/Overgeneralization—This fallacy occurs when someone makes a statement that is too broad or too inclusive. For example: “All of Whitman’s poems are about democratic ideals.” (While it is true that many of Whitman’s poems are about democratic ideals, it is also true that some deal with other subjects.)

f. Post hoc, ergo propter hoc—(a Latin phrase meaning “After this, therefore because of this”) This fallacy occurs when someone falsely assumes that an event is caused by another even simply because of the order of the events in time. For example: “Robert Frost became a successful poet after he moved to England. Therefore, moving to England made Frost into a great poet.” (Of course, Frost’s greatness depends on factors totally unrelated to his move to England.

Note: When you do persuasive writing or speaking, or when you present arguments, try to avoid logical fallacies. Also be on guard against logical fallacies in the speech and writing of others.
False Dilemma—a fallacy of logical argument that is committed when too few of the available alternatives are considered, and all but one are assessed and deemed impossible or unacceptable. E.g., A father speaking to his son says, “Are you going to go to college and make something of yourself, or are you going to end up being an unemployable bum like me?” The dilemma is the son’s supposed choice limitation: either he goes to college or he will be a bum. The dilemma is false, because the alternative of not going to college but still being employable has not been considered.

Figurative Language—an intentional departure from the normal order or meaning of words. Figurative language should not be a literal interpretation; but when used intensifies the work and satisfy the reader’s imaginations. Figurative language is the plural form for Figures of Speech.

Figures of Speech—uses of language that departs from the customary construction, order, or significance. Examples include simile, metaphor, and personification. Sometimes figures of speech create special meanings that emphasize the intention of the passage.

Genre—is a division or type of literature. Literature is commonly divided into three major genres: prose, poetry, and drama.

Hyperbole—an extravagant exaggeration of fact used either for serious or comic effects.

Imagery—author’s use of sensory related words to project an image or picture into the reader’s mind. Deals with the five senses—sight, touch, taste, feel, and smell. Imagery often evokes the reader’s emotions.

Induction—(inductive reasoning) a form of reasoning that works from a body of fact to the formulation of a generalization; opposite to deduction; frequently used as the principal form of reasoning in science and history.

Inference/infer—to draw a reasonable conclusion from the information presented.

Note: If the answer choice is directly stated, it is not inferred and is wrong.

Inverted syntax—reversing the normal word order of a sentence. E.g., In the movie Star Wars the character of Yoda speaks in inverted syntax.

Robert Frost: “Whose woods these are I think I know.”

Irony—defined as an element of style that indicates an intention opposite of what is actually stated. A method of humorous or sarcastic expression in which the intended meaning of the words is the opposite of their usual meaning. E.g., saying that a cold, windy, rainy day is “lovely.”

Some types of irony:

Verbal: A figure of speech in which what is said is the opposite of what is meant.

Situation: A situation in which there is a incongruity (difference) between the actual situation and what would seem appropriate.

Dramatic: An incongruity or discrepancy between what a character says or thinks and what the reader knows to be true.

Juxtaposition—a poetic and rhetorical device in which normally unassociated ideas, words, colors, shapes, or phrases are placed next to one another, creating an effect of surprise and wit.

Ezra Pound: “The apparition of these faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet, black bough.”

Language—manner of expression used to communicate feeling, tone, or attitude. Language may be formal or informal, or show the speaker as being educated or illiterate. Language may also involve dialect and accent.
AP Exam—when you are asked to “analyze the language,” concentrate on how the elements of language combine to form a whole—how diction, syntax, figurative language, and sentence structure create a cumulative (increasing) effect.

Logos—an appeal to logic

Loose Sentences (also called Cumulative)—sentences begin with the subject and predicate plus their modifiers and then add more modifiers. Such sentences are called cumulative (because they accumulate information as they proceed) or loose (because they are not tightly structured). E.g., Education has no equal in opening minds, instilling values, and creating opportunities. Note: Periodic is opposite. It saves the main clause until just before the end of the sentence. Everything before the main clause points toward it. E.g., In opening minds, instilling values, and creating opportunities, education has no equal.

Metonymy—[met-on-im] figure of speech that replaces the name of one thing with the name of something else closely associated with it. An important kind of metonymy is synecdoche, in which the name of a part is substituted for that of a whole (e.g., hand for worker), or vice versa. Modern literary theory has often used ‘metonymy’ in a wider sense, to designate that process of association by which metonymies are produced and understood: this involves establishing relationships of contiguity between two things, whereas metaphor establishes relationships of similarity between them. The metonymy/metaphor distinction has been associated with the contrast between syntagm and paradigm.

Mood—the second meaning of mood is literary, meaning the prevailing atmosphere or emotional aura of a work. Setting, tone, and events can affect the mood. In this usage, mood is similar to tone and atmosphere. This term has two distinct technical meanings in English writing.

The first meaning is grammatical and deals with verbal units and a speaker’s attitude. The indicative mood is used only for factual sentences: “Joe eats too quickly.” The subjunctive mood is used for a doubtful or conditional attitude: “If I were you, I’d get another job.” The imperative mood is used for commands: “Shut the door!”

Motif—a simple element that serves as a basis for expanded narrative; or, less strictly, a conventional situation, device interest, or interest. In literature, recurrent images, words, objects, phrases, or actions that tend to unify the work.

Metaphor—a figure of speech in which one thing is compared to another by being spoken of as though it were that thing. E.g., “…a sea of troubles,” “Life is a rainbow.”

Narrative Techniques—the manner in which the author tells the story. Examples include: interior monologue, dialogue, stream-of-consciousness, flashback, and foreshadow.

Nonfiction—is prose writing that presents and explains ideas or that tells about real people, places, objects, or events. Essays, biographies, autobiographies, journals, and reports are all examples of nonfiction.

Non Sequitur—[Nan Se-kwa-tar] similar to fallacy. A Statement (as a response) that does not follow logically from anything previously said.

Order of importance—a method of organizing a paper according to the relative significance of the subtopics.

Organization—presenting ideas in an order. Types of organization include:
1. Chronological—the order in which events take place.
2. Spatial—the physical description of persons and places.
3. Cause and Effect—one event brings about another.
4. “In Medias Res”—the author stats in the middle and uses the techniques of flashback and foreshadow.
Oxymoron—a figure of speech in which contradictory terms or ideas are combined.

Parallel syntactic structures—using the same part of speech or syntactic structure in (1) each element of a series, (2) before and after coordinating conjunctions (and, but, yet, or, for, not), and (3) after each of a pair of correlative conjunctions (not only…but also, neither…nor, both…and, etc.) Below is an example of definitions (1) and (3): “Over the hill, and through the woods, to grandmother’s house we go.”

Paraphrase—is the repetition of a grammatical structure. The arrangement of similarly constructed clauses, sentences, or verse lines in a pairing or other sequence suggesting some correspondence between them. The effect of paraphrase is usually one of balance arrangement achieved through repetition of the same syntactic form.

Note: Where the elements arranged in parallel are sharply opposed, the effect is one of antithesis.

Paradox—a statement that seems self-contradictory, but which may be true in fact. (Although some paradoxes cannot be resolved into truths, remaining flatly self-contradictory, e.g., Everything I say is a lie.) Ancient theorists of rhetoric described paradox as a figure of speech, but 20th century critics have given it a higher importance as a mode of understanding by which poetry challenges our habits of thought. Paradox was cultivated especially by poets of the 17th century, often in the verbally compressed form of oxymoron.

Emily Dickinson: “Success is counted sweetest / By those who ne’er succeed…”

Pathos—the quality in a work that evokes emotions or interests of the audience.

Pedantry—a display of narrow-minded and trivial scholarship or arbitrary adherence to rules and forms.

Periodic Sentence Structure—a long sentence in which the completion of the syntax and sense is delayed until the end, usually after a sequence of balanced subordinate clauses. The effect is a kind of suspense. Example: “Across the stream, beyond the clearing, from behind a fallen tree, the lion emerged.”

Personification—AP Test—a figure of speech in which an inanimate object or abstract concept is endowed with human attributes.

Persuasive Devices—when asked to analyze an author’s persuasive devices, look for the words in the passage that have strong connotations, words that intensify the emotional effect. Analyze how these words complement the writer’s argument as it builds logically.

Persona—the fictional mask or voice an author may adopt to tell a story.

Persuasion—taking a single position for the purpose of getting others to accept that position; may appeal to emotion or reason.

Phrasing—a phrase serves as a single part of speech in a sentence. Phrases may help present rhythm and may be prepositional, adjectival, adverbial, or fragments. They may also help the author show parallelism.

Point of View—the angle of vision from which a story is told. The four basic points of view are

Omniscient: The author tells the story, using the third person, knowing all and free to tell us anything.

First person: The story is told by one of its characters, using the first person.

Third person: The narrator may be omniscient, and therefore show an unrestricted knowledge of the story’s events from outside or “above” them.
Limited omniscient  The author tells the story, using the third person, but is limited to a complete knowledge of one character in the story and tells us only what the one character thinks, feels, sees, or hears.

Multiple point of view  Modern authors have also used this point of view in which we are shown the events from the positions of two or more different characters.

Prose—AP Exam—one of the major divisions of genre, prose refers to fiction and nonfiction, including all its forms. It is written in ordinary language and most closely resembles everyday speech.

Purpose—the purpose is the goal or aim of a literary work. AP exam—the commitment on the part of authors to explain what they plan to write out. Purpose is an essential part of unity and coherence. Most teachers require student writers to state their purpose in a statement of purpose, also called a thesis.

Rhetoric—the art of using words effectively in writing or speaking so as to influence or persuade. AP Exam—Greek for “orator,” this term describes the principles governing the art of writing effectively, eloquently, and persuasively.

Rhetorical structure—AP Exam—this phrase refers to how a passage is constructed. If asked to consider rhetorical structure, look at the passage’s organization and how the writer combines images, details, or arguments to serve his purpose.

Satire—a writing that ridicules or criticizes individuals, ideas, institutions, social conventions, or other work of art or literature.

Sentence Structure—the way the sentence is put together. Sentences may be fragments, simple, compound, or complex. Sentence structure also deals with elements such as dependent/independent clauses, interrogative/declarative, and fragments.

Stream of consciousness—narrative that presents the private thoughts of a character without commentary or interpretation by the author.
Structure—the structure of a novel is the planned framework of the novel. This includes the sequences of events throughout the novel. The story line from the exposition to the denouement constitutes part of the structure of the novel. The division of the book into chapters or sections also contributes to the structure.

Style—the habitual manner of expression of an author. **Author’s style** is the product of choices, made consciously or unconsciously, about elements such as vocabulary, organization, diction, imagery, pace, and even certain recurring themes or subjects.

**AP Exam**—the consideration of style has two purposes. (1) An evaluation of the sum of the choices an author makes in blending **diction**, **syntax**, **figurative language**, and other **literary devices**. Some authors’ styles are so idiosyncratic that we can quickly recognize works by the same author. We can analyze and describe an author’s personal style and make judgments on how appropriate it is to the author’s purpose. **Styles** can be called **flowery**, **explicit** (clear, unambiguous), **succinct** (laconic, brief, to the point), **rambling**, **bombastic** (pompous, overbearing), **commonplace**, **incisive** (razor sharp, insightful), to name only a few. (2) Classification of authors to a group and comparison of an author to similar authors. By means of such classification and comparison, one can see how an author’s style reflects and helps to define a **historical period**, such as the Renaissance or the Victorian period, or a **literary movement**, such as the romantic, transcendental, or realist movement.

**Stylistic devices**—**AP Exam**—essay questions that mention stylistic devices are asking you to note and analyze all of the elements in language that contribute to style, such as diction, syntax, tone, attitude, figures of speech, connotations, and repetition.

*Syllepsis*—a grammatically correct construction in which one word is placed in the same grammatical relationship to two words but in quite different senses, as **stain** is linked in different senses to **honor** and **brocade** in Pope’s line, “Or stain her honor, or her new brocade.” Most instances of syllepsis involve a word that can take an object and can have a concrete and an abstract meaning, or else a literal and a metaphorical meaning. The two kinds of words that fit this category are prepositions and transitive verbs. Syllepsis occurs when one of these object-taking words takes two or more objects that are on different levels. “Stain,” say, is a transitive verb capable of taking both a concrete object (‘brocade’) and an abstract (“honor”). By putting “honor” first and “brocade” second, Pope adds anticlimax to syllepsis, because the step from abstract to concrete is downward.

**Syllogism**—[sil-o-jism] a form of reasoning in which two statements or premises are made an a logical conclusion is drawn from them; a form of deductive reasoning.

- **Major Premise:** J and G Construction builds unsafe buildings.
- **Minor Premise:** J and G Construction build the Tower Hotel.
- **Conclusion:** The Tower Hotel is an unsafe building.

**Symbol**—something that stands for another thing; frequently an object used to represent and abstraction. E.g., the dove is a symbol of peace.

**Synaesthesia**—[Sy-naes-the-sia] a blending or confusion of different kinds of sense-impression, in which one type of sensation is referred to in terms more appropriate to another. Common synaesthesia expressions include the descriptions of colors as “loud” or “warm,” and of sounds as “smooth.” Used in literature to describe one kind of sensation in terms of another.

- Sound in terms of color **“blue note”** or **“yellow cocktail music”**
- Sound in terms of taste **“how sweet the sound”**
- Color in terms of sound **“loud shirt”**
- Color in terms of temperature **“cool green”**
- Color as **“loud”** or **“warm”**
- Sound as **“smooth”**
Syncope—[Sink-o-pi] cutting short of words through omission of a letter or syllable. Ev’ry for every. Usually confined to omission of vowels inside a word, whereas, Elision usually runs two words together. Elision—by the omission of a final or initial sound.

Synecdoche—[Sy nec do che – Sa-nek-doki] a figure of speech in which a part is substituted for the whole. “Threads” for “clothes” or “wheels” for “car.”

Syntax—in grammar, the arrangement of words as elements in a sentence to show their relationship. Combination of words to make a sentence. Syntax deals with the grammar of the sentence and word order, such as inversion.

AP Exam—the way an author chooses to join words into phrases, clauses, and sentences. Syntax is similar to diction, but one can differentiate them by thinking of syntax as groups of words, while diction refers to the individual words. In the multiple-choice section of the exam, expect to be asked some questions about how an author manipulates syntax. In the essay section, one will need to analyze how syntax produces effects.

Tone—author’s attitude toward his subject and audience expressed through characters’ actions and speech. Tone is implied and is subject to change throughout the work. A way of working or expressing things that express an attitude; the tone may be angry, matter-of-fact, ironic, playful, serious, humorous, formal, ornate, somber, etc.

AP Exam—Similar to mood, tone describes the author’s attitude toward his material, the audience, or both. Tone is easier to determine in spoken language than in written language. Considering how a work would sound if it were read aloud can help in identifying an author’s tone.

Understatement/Litote—deliberately representing something as much less than it really is.

Jonathan Swift: “Last week I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her appearance.”

AP Exam—this ironic minimalizing of fact, understatement presents something as less significant than it is. Effects an frequently be humorous and emphatic. Understatement is the opposite of hyperbole.

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